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Flappers and Macabre Dandies: Karen Blixen's 'Carnival' in the light of Søren Kierkegaard

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Abstract

Despite almost making the cut for what later became *Seven Gothic Tales* (1934), Karen Blixen's tale 'Carnival' has so far had little attention by scholars. The tale was developed in Africa in the years 1926-1927 in a period where Blixen was very occupied with the works of Søren Kierkegaard. In the tale we find one of the female characters, Annelise, to be dressed as 'the young Søren Kierkegaard'. She is described as a 'macabre dandy' and has her own radical views on Kierkegaard's work *The Seducer's Diary*. This article sets out to examine the meta-narrative connections in 'Carnival' to the works of Kierkegaard from the first part of his pseudonymous authorship, particularly with regard to narration strategies, notions of gender, art and seduction. The article also elaborates on the depiction of the young, rich and disillusioned smart-set of the *Roaring Twenties* as a group of Kierkegaardian aesthetes. In the tale a connection between dandyism of the 1840s, in which category Kierkegaard is placed, and the new female flapper of the 1920s is established as a way to examine the androgynous, which, I will argue, in 'Carnival' is connected to a notion of trans-gender humanism and eventually to the *modus vivendi* of the artist.

Key words

Karen Blixen, Søren Kierkegaard, Carnival, gender, narration, seduction, art, flapper, dandy, 1920s.

Introduction

Two works, both influenced by Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, frame Karen Blixen's production. *Ehregard* – the late one – is by far the most famous. It was published a year after Karen Blixen's death in 1963 and has had considerable attention from scholars, especially in the past ten years (Sørensen, Møller and Kondrup). The early one – 'Carnival' – which will be the subject of this paper, is much less known. It is an early Gothic Tale, intended for the collection 'Nine Tales by Nozdref's Cook' (Lasson 2008: 478), but it did not make the final cut (neither did 'The Caryatids') for what eventually became *Seven Gothic Tales* (1934) (Braad Thomsen 2011: 152). 'Carnival' was probably for the most part written in Africa 1926-27, but revised in Denmark in the early spring of 1933.¹ It was not published until 1975 in Danish in *Efterladte fortællinger* and in 1977 in the original English version in the collection *Carnival and Posthumous Tales*.² Scholars such as Thurman (1983: 277), Wivel (1987: 83) and Heede (2001: 142) have briefly mentioned the obvious Søren Kierkegaard connection in 'Carnival' where the character Annelise is dressed as 'the young Søren Kierkegaard'. However, an in-depth analysis of the tale with regard to the relation to Søren Kierkegaard has so far not been conducted.

Karen Blixen was displeased with the notable lack of female voices and points of view in Søren Kierkegaard's production, for example the one-sidedness with which Cordelia is depicted in 'The Seducer's Diary' (Blixen 1996b: 251). She made it her mission to fill out these gaps, with the characters Ehregard in *Ehregard* and Annelise and Polly in 'Carnival' as the most notable examples. In the following I will take a closer look at the connections in 'Carnival' to Søren Kierkegaard's works 'In vino veritas' ('In Vino Veritas') from *Stadier paa Livets Vei* (1845) (*Stages on Life's Way*), 'Forførerens dagbog' ('The Seducer's Diary') and 'Vexel-Driften' ('Rotation of Crops') both from *Enten-Eller. Første Deel* (1843) (*Either/Or*, Part I) and 'Ligevægten mellem det Æsthetiske og Ethiske i Personlighedens Udarbeidelse' ('The Balance Between the Esthetic and the Ethical in the Development of the Personality') from *Enten-Eller. Anden Deel* (1843) (*Either/Or*, Part II).³ I will also investigate the view of the narrator of 'Carnival' on the biographical Kierkegaard:

'that brilliant, deep, and desperate Danish philosopher of the forties, a sort of macabre dandy of his day' (Blixen 1979: 57) with regard to the connection between the dandy of the 1840s and the new androgynous *garçonne*-look of the 1920s.

Blixen, Brandes and Kierkegaard

Karen Blixen was much occupied with Søren Kierkegaard in the early 1920s, that is, in the years before she started writing 'Carnival'. In a letter from Africa dated Aug. 3, 1924 she writes to her brother Thomas Dinesen:

Læs forresten ogsaa Søren Kierkegaard, selv om Du maaske vil synes han er lidt indviklet (maaske ogsaa lidt gammeldags for Dig!). Vi har i hvert Fald 'Enten-Eller' hjemme. Jeg tror ikke, at noget Menneske kan læse ham med Eftertanke uden at gribes af ham. Han var et ærligt Menneske og led under det; maaske vil Du i hans 'Opfattelse' af 'Den Enkelte' finde noget af dig selv. (Blixen 1978a: 280)

And by the way, read Søren Kierkegaard, too, even though you may find him a little complicated (he may be a little old-fashioned to you, too!); I know that we have 'Either/Or' at home, anyway. I do not think that anyone can read him closely without being gripped by him. He was an honest person and suffered for it; you may perhaps see something of yourself in his concept of 'The Individual'. (Blixen 1981: 225-226)

Seven months after writing the letter to Thomas Dinesen – on March 5, 1925 – she left Mombasa for Denmark. Through Marseilles she traveled to Paris, where she stayed for the month of April before arriving in Denmark in early May (Blixen 1978b: 11-13). She then stayed with her mother at Rungstedlund for eight months and finally – after waiting more than twenty years – got the chance to meet Georg Brandes. The meeting has been mentioned by numerous scholars (e.g. Thurman 1983: 265), but a date has so far never been detected. A search

conducted in Georg Brandes' diary from 1923-1926 revealed that they actually met and talked on 14 October 1925 and that Brandes had dinner with Blixen the day after on the evening of 15 October. From his diary we understand that Brandes was fascinated with Blixen's life in Africa and he also mentions that she had divorced her husband and calls her 'vakker dame' (beautiful lady). All in all he seems very amused and entertained by her company (Brandes 1923-26: 84-85). Aside from having written about the works of Karen Blixen's father, Wilhelm Dinesen, Georg Brandes also wrote the first book about Kierkegaard in 1877 (Thurman 1983: 28). Here he especially highlights 'In Vino Veritas' and *Either/Or* as Kierkegaard's most supreme works:

De er sikkert det i litterær Henseende Ypperste, Kierkegaard har skrevet. Det er Arbejder, som skrevne paa et af Europas Hovedsprog havde gjort deres Forfatter verdensberømt, især som de fremkom, ikke udskilte, men som Led i et Hele af modsat Aand... Og tager man *In vino veritas* og holder den op mod Platons *Symposion*, som hvis Modstykke den fremtræder, da maa man med Beundring sande, at den taaler Sammenligningen saa godt som overhovedet en moderne Komposition kunde gøre det. (Brandes 1967: 121)

In the literary sense, they are surely the most excellent things Kierkegaard has written. If they had been written in one of the main European languages, they would have made their author famous, especially since they appeared, not isolated, but as parts in a whole contrasting spirit... And if one places '*In Vino Veritas*', alongside Plato's *Symposium*, to which it was ostensibly a companion piece, one must acknowledge with amazement that it sustains the comparison as well as any modern composition could. (Hong 1988: xvii-xviii)

In a letter to Mary Bess Westenholz, April 19, 1924 (just a few weeks after praising Kierkegaard in the letter to her brother Thomas Dinesen and before the journey to Denmark a year after), Blixen writes bitterly about a traumatic incident in 1904, where she was nineteen years old

and sent flowers to Brandes, but was prevented by her mother from meeting him in person.⁴ In the letter she also describes the role Brandes played with regard to her interest in literature: 'jeg havde længe levet i Brandes' bøger, og kan sige at det er ham, som har aabenbaret Literaturen for mig, – for Shakespeare, Shelley, Heine – fik jeg gennem ham' (Blixen 1978a: 260) ('I had been immersed in Brandes's books for a long time and I can say that it was he who revealed literature to me. My first personal enthusiasm for books, – for Shakespeare, Shelley, Heine, – came to me through him', Blixen 1981: 209). With Blixen's admiration for both Brandes⁵ and Kierkegaard it seems likely that she also read Brandes' book about Søren Kierkegaard: *Søren Kierkegaard. En kritisk Fremstilling i Grundrids* (1877), which was the standard work on Kierkegaard at the time. She might even have discussed Kierkegaard with Brandes during their. What we do know for sure from her letter to Thomas Dinesen is that Kierkegaard's *Enten-Eller* (*Either/Or*) was in the meetings in October 1925, but we will never now for sure (Brandes does not mention Kierkegaard in his diary entries about Blixen). family library at Rungstedlund.⁶ It seems plausible that Blixen conducted further studies on Kierkegaard in the eight months she stayed in Denmark, given that she started working on 'Carnival'⁷ that same spring, after her return to Kenya on February 1, 1926. In this tale – as we will now see – several works by Kierkegaard play important roles as backdrop texts.

The Symposium: 'Carnival' and 'In Vino Veritas'

All in all, the structure of 'Carnival' is that of a Symposium and the frame is very similar to Søren Kierkegaard's 'In Vino Veritas' from *Stages on Life's Way*. The latter – as Brandes also mentions – is obviously inspired by Plato's Symposium (Brandes 1967: 121). *The Symposium* is a philosophical text by Plato dated c. 385–380 BCE. It concerns itself with the genesis, purpose and nature of love. Love is examined in a sequence of speeches by men attending the symposium, where each man must deliver a speech in praise of love. Blixen's 'Carnival' can be seen as a part of a Kierkegaardian 'chinesisk Æskespil' ('Chinese puzzle')⁸ of literary reworkings of the genre of the Symposium: the

drinking party, where the nature of love is discussed. It is said in 'In Vino Veritas' that 'der skulde tales om Elskov eller om Forholdet mellem Mand og Kvinde' (Kierkegaard, SKS. *Stadier paa Livets Vej*) ('the subject should be erotic love (Elskov) or the relation between man and woman', Kierkegaard 1988: 30-31). As we know 'In vino veritas' means 'In wine there is truth' and Victor Eremita opens the banquet by saluting the participants with a glass of wine: 'Med dette Bæger, hvis Duft allerede bedaarer min Sands, hvis kølige Hede allerede opflammer mit Blod, hilser jeg Eder, kjære Drikkebrødre, og byder Eder Velkommen' (Kierkegaard, SKS. *Stadier*) ('With this glass, whose fragrance already beguiles my senses, whose cool heat already inflames my blood, I salute you, dear drinking companions, and bid you welcome', Kierkegaard, 1988: 23). The narrator later states that: 'de spiste, drak og drak og bleve drukne, som det hedder i det Hebraiske, de drak tappert' (Kierkegaard, SKS. *Stadier*) ('they ate, drank and drank, and became drunk, as it says in Hebrew – that is, they drank mightily', Kierkegaard 1988: 31).

The major similarities with regard to setting, composition and theme between Kierkegaard's 'In Vino Veritas' and Blixen's 'Carnival' are that they both take place at a location north of Copenhagen and the wine flows abundantly while the participants discuss women and erotic love. Especially the significance of wine plays an important role in both works. Here from 'Carnival': 'it is wonderful to have had so much to drink that you can speak as easily as you think' (Blixen 1979: 64, Mimi), 'Hot from wine and dancing the guests arrived' (ibid. 66), 'Flushed by wine under the powder of his mask' (ibid. 68, about Julius), 'Deeply moved by drink and love' (ibid. 69, about Charlie), 'he had drunk much tonight to get an inspiration' and 'Under the influence of these various moods and wines' (ibid. 5-86, both about Tido), 'Charlie tried to run his mental eye over the situation, but he had drunk too much for that' (ibid. 89), 'He refilled his glass and drunk it down' (ibid. 92, about Rosendaal) and towards the end the narrator states that: 'The wine seemed somehow alive on its own now' (ibid. 102).⁹ On the first page of 'In Vino Veritas' the narrator compares the process of recollection to the process of making noble wine:

og som den ædle Viin vinder ved at passere Linien, fordi Vandpartiklerne fordampe, saaledes vinder Erindringen ogsaa ved at tabe Hukommelsens Vandpartikler: dog bliver Erindringen ligesaa lidet derved en Indbildning som den ædle Viin bliver det. (Kierkegaard, SKS. *Stadier*)

just as noble wine is improved by crossing the line [the equator, according to the notes on page 678 in *Stages on Life's Way*, my comment] because the particles of water vaporize, so recollection is improved by losing the water particles of memory; yet recollection no more becomes a figment of the imagination thereby does noble wine. (Kierkegaard 1988: 21)

The ability to recollect is also compared to creativity: 'Betingelsen for al Productivitet er det at kunne erindre' (Kierkegaard, SKS. *Stadier*) ('The ability to recollect is the condition for all productivity', Kierkegaard 1988: 14) but the narrator underlines that: 'Erindringens Perse derimod maa Enhver træde alene' (Kierkegaard, SKS. *Stadier*) ('The wine press of recollection, however, everyone must tread alone', Kierkegaard 1988: 14). Through the comparison to recollection, the creation of fine wine can be compared to the creation of art that also contains 'the essence' of life, understood as essential truths about the world. In 'Carnival' we see how the wine influences and moves the characters in various ways and inspire them to the profound discussion 'upon life and death' and to 'speak as easily as you think' (to speak the truth, so to speak). Blixen here seems to adopt the narrator's point of view that is apparent in 'In Vino Veritas': that fine wine is a metaphor for art and in the end synonymous with truth (*veritas*).

In both 'Carnival' and 'In Vino Veritas' we also find the majority of the participants to be disillusioned and unhappy lovers, with a couple of exceptions in each piece: Johannes the Seducer in 'In Vino Veritas' and Camelia in 'Carnival'. We also find one character in both works that has never been in love: 'the Young Man' in 'In Vino Veritas' and Polly (Arlecchino) in 'Carnival'. Polly is *the Young Woman* of the party (only nineteen years old and a virgin), the equivalent of Kierkegaard's 'The Young Man', whom her bigger sister Mimi (Pierrot) lectures about the

trials and tribulations of love, warning her against falling in love. We also find the depraved and demonic character of 'the Fashion Designer' from 'In Vino Veritas' (indeed a 'macabre dandy' type) mimicked in the artist Rosendaal, who is dressed as an old Chinese eunuch. Both are older, demonic, yet effeminate men, who do not seem to engage in any sexual relationships with women, but are utterly fascinated by them in a spiritual sense only. And just as the five bachelors in 'In Vino Veritas' are confronted with a person who thinks and lives a very different life than themselves – the married man Judge Wilhelm – we also find a character alien to the young smart set in 'Carnival.' He is Zamor, the antiquity dealer Madame Rubinstein's assistant (who may even be her son), dressed as Madame Du Barry's black page, who turns up unexpectedly towards the end of the story and threatens the party with a gun. These are the major structural similarities between 'In Vino Veritas' and 'Carnival'.

Mask and Gender

The major difference in 'Carnival' with regard to Kierkegaard's 'In Vino Veritas' (and Plato's *Symposium* for that matter) is that Blixen in 'Carnival' breaks the rule that only men are allowed to participate and speak at a Symposium. In 'Carnival' the party consists of 'the company of four lovely women, and the conversation, upon life and death, of four men' (Blixen 1979: 102). But Karen Blixen goes further. In 'Carnival' we not only find an equal number of women and men participating, but we also find men dressed as women, women dressed as men, a man dressed as a eunuch (a sort of non-gender) thus making it very difficult to grasp who is speaking and to what gender they actually belong. Here is the line-up:

Tido / Harlequin (futuristic Harlequin): A man wearing a man's costume

Camelia / Camelia: A woman wearing a woman's costume

Mimi / Pierrot: A woman wearing a man's costume

Polly / Arlecchino (traditional Harlequin): A woman wearing a man's costume

Annelise / Young Søren Kierkegaard: A woman wearing a man's costume

Julius / Venetian Lady: A man wearing a woman's costume

Charlie / Magenta Domino: A man wearing a woman's costume

Rosendaal / Eunuch: A man wearing a non-gender costume

The purpose of this gender confusion is not only to represent the 'gender trouble' (to use Judith Butler's term) of the 1920s and the (homo)-sexual revolution (I will get back to that), but also an attempt to escape a gender-biased view on women and erotic love. This, I will argue, is a meta-narrative counter comment to Kierkegaard's 'In Vino Veritas' where woman is represented solely through the eyes of five male speakers, who in addition are also bachelors and according to Johannes the Seducer even 'Ulykkelige Elskere' (Kierkegaard, SKS. *In vino*) ('unhappy lovers') (Kierkegaard 1988: 71), meaning that we have a *very* strong gender-bias with regard to the representation of woman and love in 'In Vino Veritas'. The narration strategy in 'Carnival' is to free the words spoken and the opinions expressed by the participants, by masking the persons speaking, so the (first-time) reader is unsure whether it is a man or in fact a woman who is expressing the opinion. The main consequence of this gender obfuscation is to see the characters first and foremost as *human beings* and only secondly as gender. It consequently also forces the reader of 'Carnival' to approach the subject matter in a less biased way; to disregard the subject (the gender of the person speaking) and instead focus on the object (the subject *matter*, so to speak). Tido, dressed as a woman in a magenta domino¹⁰, articulates the project:

No woman could ever look her best as much as in a mask only, or actualize to the same extent the combined human ideals of truthfulness and dignity, equally difficult to achieve

in clothes, or all uncovered. Your own mask would give you at least that release from self toward which all religions strive. A little piece of night itself, containing all its mystery, depth, and bliss, rightly placed for giving you its freedom without renunciation. Your center of gravity is moved from the ego to the object; through the true humility of self-denial you arrive at an all-comprehending unity with life, and only thus can great works of art be accomplished. (Blixen 1979: 67-68)

The idea is that by masking the naked woman, woman *an sich* will become the object of adoration; or, in this case, the object of discussion. If unmasked, the face of the subject, the individual woman, would make the observer and the observed unable to separate subject from object.

Kierkegaard and Blixen. The Mask as Artistic Strategy

In the central passage above Blixen also lets Tido articulate an artistic strategy that would later become her own ideal, but which is inspired by Kierkegaard's strategy of making the author-individuality disappear through the use of pseudonyms and double-reflected narrators. It is the move from the individual to the artist, from subjectivity to objectivity, from the material world to the idea, and here 'the mask', or the strategy of using pseudonyms, plays a crucial role, in order to make the leap from 'the ego to the object' – from the author-individuality to the object (in Danish 'the object' understood as 'genstanden') – which according to Tido is necessary for the creation of truly great art. The individuality of the artist ('the ego') must die ('release from self') in order to create the ability to focus entirely on the phenomena of the world ('the objects' *an sich*) and from any perspective; be it with the eyes of the pseudonym or the eyes of any 'individualities' (fictional characters) thus obtaining 'an all-comprehending unity with life' as Tido explains it in 'Carnival' (ibid. 67-68). In Joakim Garff's presentation of Søren Kierkegaard's first longer publication *Af en endnu Levendes Papirer* (1838) (*From the Papers of a Person Still Alive*), which is a critique of H.C. Andersen's *Kun en Spillemand* (1837) (*Only a Fiddler*) (1845),

Garff calls attention to Jørgen Bonde Jensen's analysis of an aspect of Kierkegaard's critique of Andersen (Bonde Jensen 1996: 57-89). Here, Kierkegaard proposes that the author-personality must die in order for true art to be created:

livanskuelse forudsætter, at man ikke 'tillader sit Liv altfor meget at futte ud', ja en vis selvrensning fremhæves i det hele taget, som en betingelse for at kunne 'tilkæmpe sig en dygtig Personlighed', thi det er kun 'denne saaledes døde og forklarede Personlighed, der bør og kan producere, ikke den manglekantede, jordiske, palpable'. (Garff 2000: 128)

a life-view presupposes that one does not 'permit one's life to fizzle out too much'. Indeed, he generally emphasizes a sort of self-censorship as the precondition for being able to 'win a competent personality for oneself', because it is only 'such a dead and transfigured personality – not the multifaceted, earthly, palpable personality – that is and ought to be capable of producing anything. (Garff 2005: 143)

Garff concludes that: 'At dø er nemlig at *af dø*, at dø bort fra denne verden, sin umiddelbarhed, for at genopstå i åndens verden til en anden umiddelbarhed' (Garff 2000: 129) ('To die is, in fact, to die away, to die away from this world, from one's immediacy, in order to be resurrected, in the world of spirit, to a second immediacy', Garff 2005: 144). In an early diary entry from August 1, 1835, the young Søren Kierkegaard is already aware how this dynamic of becoming-an-artist works and how it requires a shift from constant subjective self-reflection to a focus on the outside world instead: 'Derfor kunde jeg ønske at blive Acteur, for at jeg ved at sætte mig ind i en Andens Rolle kunde faae, saa at sige, et Surrogat for mit eget liv' (quoted in Garff 2000: 52) ('Thus I could wish to become an actor so that by putting myself in someone else's role I could obtain, so to speak, a surrogate for my own life', Garff 2005: 58) which is exactly the shift that Tido in 'Carnival' calls 'self-denial'. It is worth noting that 'Carnival' was intended for publication under the pseudonym – the mask – 'Nozdref's Cook' (Lasson 2008: 478),

which is a character from Gogol's *Мёртвые души* (1842) (*Dead Souls*), who according to Brundbjerg is a chef, who uses whatever is at hand to create highly unusual combinations, sometimes with a brilliant result and sometimes with a disastrous result (ibid. 111). He is a wild and unconventional *createur* who turns conventions upside down, just like Blixen does in 'Carnival' by inverting the gender roles and breaking the conventions for what (especially) women are allowed to discuss and articulate. Using the mask strategy both internally in 'Carnival' as composition strategy (masking the characters) and externally by using a pseudonym (masking the author), Blixen tries to distance herself and remove her individuality as author ('af dø') from the content and the characters, closely following the ideals outlined in Kierkegaard's critique of H.C. Andersen. In *Det umenneskelige* Heede elaborates over two pages on the important passage expressed by Tido. However, he does not make the final connection to the strategy of the artist that Blixen has borrowed from Kierkegaard, the idea of de-subjectivization. Heede does, though, arrive at the same destination, when he concludes the following about Blixen's oeuvre as such in his concluding chapter:

Subjektet fremstår i de blixenske tekster – ligesom seksualiteten, kønnet, kroppen og naturen – som et åbent spørgsmål, et problemfelt, et hul eller mangel, der provokerer ved sin tomhed. Det er denne 'anti-humanisme' eller bedre: anti-tropologi, der efter min mening rummer de mest provokerende, udfordrende og aktuelle potentialer i de blixenske diskurser (...) Utopien i alle tre diskurser (Blixen, Foucault and Butler, my comment) læser jeg ikke som en genopdagelse eller erobring af 'jeg'et', men derimod som en permanent flugt fra selv'et forstået som en kritik af den type individualiseringer, som det moderne samfunds uhyre stærke herredømmediskurser påtvinger subjekterne (...) Denne ikke-subjektivering eller med Foucaults ord: 'Menneskets død' (Foucault 1966) er ikke en morbid dystopi, men en vitalistisk åbning mod former for liv og begær hinsides de antropologiske cirkelslutninger (...) (Heede 2001: 247-248)

The subject in Blixen's texts emerges – just as as sexuality, gender, the body and nature do – as an open question, a problem area, a gap or a lack that provokes through its emptiness. It is this 'anti-humanism' or better: anti-tropology, which, I will argue, accounts for the most provoking, challenging and relevant potentials in the blixenesque discourses I read the Utopia in all three discourses (Blixen, Foucault and Butler, my comment) not as a rediscovery or conquest of the 'self', but instead as a permanent escape from the 'self', understood as a critic of the types of individualizations, which the master narratives of modern society forces upon the subjects (...) This de-subjectivization, or in the words of Foucault: 'the death of man' (Foucault 1966) is not a morbid dystopia, but a vitalistic opening towards other forms of life and desire beyond the anthropological *circulus vitiosus* (...) (my translation)

Blixen's answer to this rather utopian ideal is, in 'Carnival', the idea of the androgynous, dehumanized artist, who – in the limitless works of fiction – is able to escape 'individualization' and 'totalization of modern power structures'. The utopian position that Heede mentions is actually not as utopian as one initially would think, even though it is only a privilege of the few. Blixen – in the words of Polly – as an artist, eventually becomes 'two-dimensional', which means bodiless words in a book: 'I am tired of being three-dimensional, it seems to me very vulgar (Blixen 1979: 70). Or, in the words of Aitken, 'her assertion that in writing she died into her art, becoming 'a piece of printed matter,' was never more poignantly enacted than in these years (while writing *Babette's Feast*, my comment), as her body gradually withered to skeletal, wraithlike proportions' (ibid. 255). To make the final connection to Søren Kierkegaard, she becomes what the narrator in the closing scene of 'In Vino Veritas' claims to be: 'Men hvo er da jeg?.... Jeg er den rene Væren, og derfor mindre næsten end Intet. Jeg er den rene Væren, der er med alle vegne, men dog ikke bemærkelig' (Kierkegaard, SKS. *Stadier*) ('But who then am I? I am pure being and thus almost less than nothing. I am the pure being that is everywhere present but yet not noticeable', Kierkegaard 1988: 86) as a hovering spirit, as a bodiless 'body' of work 'everywhere present yet not noticeable' – as

the work of the great, influential and immortal artist. That position appears to be (the only?) one that can fulfil the demands of Heede's depersonalized and dehumanized utopia.

The Flapper of the 1920s

Er det at være 'la garçonne', som er eders virkelige ideal? I har jo længe været det. (Blixen 1985: 11, originally written 1923-1924)

Is your real ideal to be a tomboy? Well, you have been so for a long time. (Blixen 1987: 38)

'Carnival' is, however, much more than a mere reworking of 'In Vino Veritas' and meta-reflections on the artist and artistic strategies with Kierkegaard as the major source of inspiration. It is also a precise and profound depiction of the new, young metropolitan smart set of the 1920s and their 'mode of existence' (to use a Kierkegaardian term), comparable to the like of F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway. This is an aspect of the tale which has so far not had the attention by scholars it deserves.

'Carnival' takes place in 1925¹¹ and is in that regard unusual since it is the only fully-developed tale Blixen wrote that takes place in a clearly defined contemporary setting and environment (the smart set of 1920s Denmark). Again Karen Blixen uses Søren Kierkegaard as a starting point to unfold her observations with regard to gender – this time on a much more concrete, historical level. An allusion to Søren Kierkegaard on the first page in 'Carnival' is the small crack in the wall that opens up an extensive discussion of androgyny and gender:

The party consisted of, to take the ladies first: Watteau Pierrot, Arlecchino, the young Søren Kierkegaard – that brilliant, deep and desperate philosopher of the forties, a sort of macabre dandy of his day – and Camelia ... The rare grace of the young Søren Kierkegaard is really familiar to a great part of the highest civilized world, for it is a favorite subject with the young painters of our day. In her own country there was not

an exhibition in which it did not figure and she hangs in the National Gallery as a lady with a fan, and at the Glyptothek in that strange pale/green study: nymph and unicorn drinking at a forest pool. She also wrote what was considered very modern poetry, and it seems likely that in her case the spirit will turn out to be, contrary to what is presumably its normal fate, transient, and the flesh immortal. (Blixen 1979: 57)

The young Søren Kierkegaard is here described as a 'macabre dandy' with a 'rare grace' that the narrator states is 'really familiar to a great part of the highest civilized world', since it is 'a favorite subject of the painters of our day' (the year 1925) without 'an exhibition in which it did not figure'. The narrator then goes on to mention that Annelise, who is dressed as 'the young Søren Kierkegaard' but is referred to by the female pronouns 'her' and 'she', is working as a nude model and her naked body now 'hangs in the National Gallery'. The 'rare grace' that Annelise's body has in common with the 'macabre dandy' of the 1840s and which is the 'favorite subject of the painters of our day' is the androgynous look of the 1920s flapper, where fashion for young women was short hair, flat breasts and slim hips (also known as the *garçonne*-look):

In Hollywood films of the 1920s, and in the short stories and novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald, the flapper is a cigarette-smoking, dance-mad young female in her teens to early twenties.... She is the most iconic figure of American 'Roaring' Twenties; and the symbol of teenage emancipation.... In France the flapper image was first projected in the pages of a novel: Victor Marguerite's *La Garçonne* (published in 1922). The focus of the story is a 19-year-old flapper called Monique, who leaves home (after her fiancé has been unfaithful); cuts her hair short, dresses in men's clothes and pursues a series of lesbian affairs. The book was a bestseller (it sold over 750.000 copies in its first year of publication). (Fowler 2008: 59, 62)

The term flapper is mentioned directly in 'Carnival', when Tido

reflects upon his lover Annelise, the young Søren Kierkegaard: 'It had made an impression upon him that she should, at twenty-four, his own age, have it in her to think and behave like a *flapper* of fifteen' (Blixen 1979: 83, my italics). The term is also alluded to in other passages (ibid. 72, 73, 95) and the party is described by the narrator as a classical 'smart set' of the 1920s: 'They were all friends – four of them being very much in love with one another – *disillusioned, rich, and hungry*' (ibid. 67, my italics). Rosendaal, who is the only older participant in the supper party, is however highly critical of the new modern times and gender roles in flux, especially with regard to women and the new *garçonne*-look:

To my mind you young women of your appalling smart set, as a class, the only righteous people of our town, the only contemporaries of ours who make it their object to represent an idea.... 'Do we really manage to shock you, Rosie, by having no dimples in our derrières?' asked Camelia.... I can't imagine nothing more pathetic than you young women who have had to turn your faces all round from your décolletage, because there was nothing but the Desert of Gobi in front of them (ibid. 74, 73, 72)

As Blixen correctly observes, androgyny becomes a female ideal in the 1920s, and that is historically a new phenomenon, which she discusses primarily through Rosendaal in 'Carnival.' The bodily female ideal was suddenly to have 'no dimples in the derrière' and breasts as flat as 'the Desert of Gobi'. Women started to wear 'step-in panties' too and practice a bohemian life style: drinking, driving, smoking, going to nightclubs and having many lovers. In 'Carnival' Rosendaal interprets the women of the 1920s – the flappers – as 'the only contemporaries of ours who make it their object to *represent an idea*' (ibid. 74, my italics), even though they might not be aware of it themselves. This means that the obliteration of traditional female shapes (breasts and bottom) and the promotion of the androgynous look according to Rosendaal represents the idea of female emancipation understood as the idea that we should first and foremost be recognized as human

beings and only secondly as gender, which is a point of view Blixen also expressed repeatedly in her letters from Africa during the years she wrote 'Carnival' in Africa. For example, this is the view expressed in her letter to Mary Bess Westenholz from May 23, 1926, where she also writes that she is working on a couple of 'Marionetkomedier' and one of them is 'Carnival':

Er det i hvert Fald ikke at ønske, at under saadanne Forhold, hvor Mennesker mødes for at komme til Klarhed og bestemme over store Spørgsmaal, som angaar hele Menneskeheden, de kunde komme til at mødes som Mennesker og ikke, som før i Tiden, som først og fremmest Medlemmer af en Stamme eller et Lav eller, som nu, som Medlemmer af en Nation, et politisk Parti, eller af det ene eller andet køn' (Blixen 1978b: 43, my italics).

Isn't it at least desirable that under such circumstances where people meet to achieve certainty and decide on great matters regarding humanity that they could meet as human beings and not as in the past, first and foremost as member of a tribe or and association, or as now as members of a nation, political party or one gender or the other. (my translation)

The androgynous flapper of the 1920s is, in 'Carnival', interpreted as the physical manifestation of this ideal expressed in young Blixen's letters, even though it is not articulated by the flappers as a deliberate intention or goal, but here viewed as an expression of the collective un-conscious. This idea also becomes the composition strategy in 'Carnival', with its masks and gender inversions. The reader is obliged to approach the subject matter as ideas expressed by *human beings* detached from gender and convention. The form of 'Carnival' (genderlessness) is also the message, which is much more pronounced in 'Carnival' compared to other tales of Blixen dealing with gender.

As has been pointed out by many scholars over the years, most recently by Braad Thomsen and Stecher-Hansen, Blixen would later leave this radical view on the two genders expressed in 'Carnival', which we also find in the essay 'On Modern Marriage and Other Observations'

(written in the first part of the 1920s, but not published until 1977). She later developed a more traditional point of view on the two genders as being fundamentally and ontologically different (woman as 'being', man as 'doing') as she expressed in the essay 'En Båltale med 14 Aars Forsinkelse' (Radio talk, Jan. 11, 1953) ('Oration at a Bonfire Fourteen Years Late') (1979). It is worth noting that she in the early 1950s not only departs radically from her idea of the genderless human being that she promulgates in 'Carnival' and in her letters from the 1920s. In so doing, she also leaves behind the position Heede assigns her in the concluding chapter of *Det umenneskelige*, according to which gender and sexuality are an 'åbent spørgsmål' (open question) (Heede 2001: 247).

The Carnival of the Roaring Twenties

The 1920s break-up from traditional gender conventions exemplified by the androgynous look of the 1920s flapper also sparked one of the most radical sexual revolutions in modern history with regard to bi- and homosexuality. As Dag Heede rightly characterizes the set-up in 'Carnival': 'Fortællingens univers er præget af mulig hermafroditisme, transvestitisme og mandlig homoseksualitet, promiskuitet og anonym sex' (Heede 2001: 142) (The fictional world in the tale is characterized by possible hermaphroditism, transvestism and male homosexuality, promiscuity and anonymous sex, my translation). This set-up is also a precise image of the new frivolous and experimental approach of the 1920s to sexuality and gender, especially among the rich smart set and artists in Paris (Herzog 2011: 50), Berlin and in Kenya too (Braad Thomsen 2011: 73-75). In the 1920s there were two hundred and twenty-one lesbian bars in Berlin and the famous yearly spring carnival of the École des Beaux-Arts on the left bank of Paris culminated in public bi-sexual orgies after the semi-nude parade through the city had taken place, as can be seen in the TV Documentary: *Legendary Sin Cities: Paris, Berlin, Shanghai* (Canell and Remerowski: 2005). In the year 1925, in which the supper party in 'Carnival' is set, Karen Blixen stayed in Paris for the month of April before arriving in Denmark in early May. She wrote to her mother that: 'Da jeg har været saa daarlig klædt,

med Huller paa Skoene og Tøjet temmeligt i Laser ... har jeg bevæget mig mest på *venstre Seinebred*, som jeg synes har stor charme' (Blixen 1978b: 11, my italics) (As I have been looking so ill groomed, with holes in my shoes and my clothes more or less in rags ... I have kept mostly to the *left bank of the Seine*, which I always find so charming, Blixen 1981: 232, my italics). The left bank of the Seine or the 'Rive Gauche' was the part of the city where the artists and writers would hang out, drinking, living a bohemian lifestyle in 1925, when Blixen was visiting. Even though she mentions nothing about participating in the 'moveable feast' (to quote the title of Hemingway's posthumous novel about his years in Paris in the 1920s), her promenades took her through the openly bi-sexual, and 24/7-partying 'Rive Gauche' (Glick 2009: 63) which must have given her some inspiration for the way she elaborates on gender, flappers and androgyny in 'Carnival' (and not just from the debauched 'happy valley circle' in Kenya, which is commonly associated with the sexual under tones of the tale' (e.g. Braad Thomsen 2011: 73-75). Sexual liberation and homosexuality were closely connected to the carnival tradition in 1920s Paris, since the carnival created room for carnivalesque inversions such as gender-inversion; the carnival thus created sort of a legitimate backdrop for the bi- and homosexual escapades, and we see Blixen making that connection too in 'Carnival'. What has been overlooked so far in the Blixen scholarship is that 'Carnival' is also a very precise and very important analysis of a decade where things – especially gender roles – were turned upside down and old conventions challenged. Blixen had a very astute eye for her own time, which is important to emphasize. I will here argue that the gender trouble of her own time, the 1920s, is the major source of inspiration behind the gender inversions and the depiction of bi- and homosexuality we find not only in 'Carnival' but also in many of the *Seven Gothic Tales* (as has been treated in depth by Heede) even though the settings are removed back in time to the nineteenth century. We find Agnese in 'The Roads Around Pisa' from *Seven Gothic Tales* to be dressed as a young dandy: 'a young saint masquerading as a dandy' (Blixen 2002: 37) just like Annelise in 'Carnival'. We also detect the exact same thoughts with regard to man and woman as human beings rather than gender. In 'The Roads Around



Peter Klæstrup's portrait of Søren Kierkegaard from ca. 1845, Frederiksborgmuseet (The Royal Library, Copenhagen).

Pisa' this ideal is also propagated by Augustus von Schimmelman, when he reflects upon his conversation with Agnese and the positive effect it has for the mode of their conversation that she is dressed in mens clothes (Blixen 2002: 23, 34).

The Dandy and the Flapper

The connection Blixen establishes between Kierkegaard and the new female flapper is that the flapper – both in physical appearance and in her independent lifestyle – looks and acts a lot like a dandy of the 1840s. The dandy emerged as a new male type in the late eighteenth century and came to be associated with a certain type of intellectual

or artist in the first part of the nineteenth century, with Lord Byron (1788-1824) and Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867) as the most famous examples. According to Blixen we can also include Søren Kierkegaard ('a sort of macabre dandy'), who was the Copenhagen *flâneur* and free spirit of the day. Dandyism is also associated with a certain type of aristocratic individualism as defined by Barbey d'Aurevilly: 'the dandy does not work; he exists' (Blixen 1979: 264), and Baudelaire, for whom dandyism was a 'cult of self' characterized by 'first and foremost the burning need to create for oneself a personal originality' (Glick 2009: 27). These definitions fit very well with the young Søren Kierkegaard's burning desire to foster an image of personal originality for himself, with emphasis on artistic and individual expression, as I shall discuss in what follows.

Like the *garçonne* or flapper, the dandy too has an androgynous appearance expressed in the shape of his body. It was the dandies of Paris who began to wear the corset again, after it had fallen out of fashion around the time of the French revolution. It persisted through the 1840s (Steele 2001: 36-39). Especially in the period from around 1820 to 1835, a wasp-waisted figure (a small, nipped-in look to the waist) was desirable for men as well as women; this could be achieved by wearing a corset so that the frock coat or morning coat would give him the hourglass shape we normally associate with the female body. We see Søren Kierkegaard appear in that type of jacket on Peter Klæstrup's drawing (presumably from 1845), even though it is difficult to tell how much the drawing is a caricature¹². Søren Kierkegaard was also very conscious with regard to his hairstyle, which would follow the latest European fashion. In the small note 'Søren Kierkegaard som dandy' (Søren Kierkegaard as a Dandy) Arild Christensen calls attention to a portrait of the young Søren Kierkegaard called *Et Portrait af Søren Kierkegaard*, which was published after his death by Dr. Ahnfeldt (Magnussen 1942: 191). The hairstyle of the young Søren Kierkegaard was mistakenly thought to be just rumpled by Kierkegaard scholar Rikard Magnussen, even though it is in fact following the latest Paris fashion called 'en broussailles' (in brush) according to Christensen (Christensen 1953: 22). The dandy was often financially independent, too, which allowed him to live a certain type of connoisseur life-style

with extravagant clothing, fine wine and lavish dining. In just one year in 1836 Søren Kierkegaard managed to spend 1262 rigsdaler on books, silk scarves, jackets, fine wine, tobacco and theatre tickets, a sum which, according to Garff, was more than the yearly salary of a university professor at that time.¹³ Because of his feminine traits and intellectual lifestyle, the dandy is commonly associated with ambiguous sexuality, even though he could also be a heterosexual womanizer.¹⁴

Karen Blixen is here again employing the Kierkegaardian 'chinesisk Æskespil' ('Chinese puzzle') to rework the dandy as a character, starting with the connection to the biographical Kierkegaard, via Kierkegaard's character Johannes the Seducer, to her own fictional character Annelise, who is dressed 'as a dandy of the forties' (Blixen 1979: 83) but who, in the 1920s setting of the tale, at the same time looks like a lesbian dandy of the day from the 'Rive Gauche'. Both the flapper and the dandy represent, I want to argue, the androgyny that Blixen connects with the idea (and ideal) of the *human being*, who has integrated traits from both genders into his or her personality and who is not constrained by traditional gender roles and conventions. She lets these two types, the flapper and the dandy, who are separated by almost a century, meld together in the character Annelise in 'Carnival'.

Annelise the Seducer

If we bear in mind the affinities between the figures of the dandy and the flapper, we begin to see that Annelise can be regarded as Blixen's version of Johannes the Seducer, but a much more radical version. Dressing like a dandy of the 1840s, she in fact also looks like the new *lesbian dandy* type of the 1920s, clad in nineteenth-century male clothing and a monocle. This corresponds to contemporary depictions of similar figures such as the portrait photo of Radclyffe Hall from 1928, and the painting of *Una, Lady Troubridge* from 1924 by Romaine Brooks (Glick 2009: 65-66). Annelise is writing modern poetry too, like Gertrude Stein or Radclyffe Hall. She has, the text tells us, developed her own radical view on Søren Kierkegaard's work 'The Seducer's Diary':

But she had her own views upon the book, and had maintained, and lectured to him upon, the idea that the triumph of Johannes is not complete as long as he keeps Cordelia in the dark as to his prospects of leaving her forever at daybreak, and that the name of seducer is falsely assumed where you are in any way deceiving your partner. More honest than Kierkegaard's seducer, she has presented her problem straight to him, this night of love was *à prendre ou à laisser*. This ultimatum she had delivered only a few days ago, now *her costume as a dandy of the forties* brought it home to him (Blixen 1979: 82-83, my italics)

With both Annelise and Tido having this demonic knowledge, their night will become much more intense and desperate, and the following departure more tragic and painful (the idea is carried out in 'The Old Chevalier' from *Seven Gothic Tales*). A very sophisticated and macabre *pas de deux* and, according to Annelise, utterly more poetic than the final scene in 'The Seducer's Diary', where Cordelia is taken by surprise by Johannes' deceit the following morning and Johannes himself returns home in content triumph. Here again we find an inversion compared to Kierkegaard, since we in 'Carnival' find a woman in the role as the seducer and propagator of this rather masochistic suggestion, completely transgressing the rules for what women – at least before the big city flapper movement of the 1920s – were normally able to articulate. But Blixen also wants to invest the text with a bit of gender equality here, since she was displeased with the one-sided way Cordelia was depicted in 'The Seducer's Diary'. This she expresses in a letter to Aage Henriksen, while she was working on her second Kierkegaard-tale *Ehrengard* during the 1950s: 'hvis hun ikke er et Menneske, da er han heller ikke noget Menneske, hvis hun ikke er en Heltinde i en Historie, da er han heller ikke nogen Helt' (letter to Aage Henriksen, October 14, 1954 in Blixen 1996a: 251) (if she is not a human being then he is not a human being either, if she is not a heroine in a story, neither is he a hero, my translation). She had even planned a third tale with the working title 'Cornelia', (similar to the name of the sister of Søren Kierkegaard's fiancée, Regine Olsen). This we find listed among the names of the tales that would later become

Winter's Tales (1942) in several books in her library, e.g. inside the copy of Georg Brandes *Hovedstrømninger* but also in a copy of H.C. Andersens's *Eventyr og Historier* (Bondesson 1982: 300, 133).

Annelise is living entirely poetically, and she is of course Blixen's female version of Kierkegaard's Johannes the Seducer; but much more radical than Kierkegaard's version. Whereas Johannes still operates within the frame of 1840s society, trying not to stick out too much, constantly being in control of the situation and meticulously aware of not harming himself, Annelise doesn't take such petty precautions: 'She was so fresh. Hard too, and cold' (Blixen 1979: 82). She does not care what happens to her in a physical sense, good or bad, as long it has aesthetic and poetic value, be it the macabre love affair with Tido, or enrolling in a brothel in Singapore. But at the same time she also represents another meta-narrative connection to 'In Vino Veritas' that concerns the status of women in the nineteenth century and what the flappers of the 1920s wanted to break away from. In this passage we find Annelise's answer to Julius, after he has asked her to participate in a lottery that will make one of them extremely rich and the rest of the partygoers penniless for a whole year:

Are you coming in, Annelise?' asked Julius. 'Yes', she said. 'If you do not win the prize', he said, 'you will have to go into a brothel, with my Pegasus – or, otherwise, give up having your poems published. Let us see now how much of an idealist you are'. 'Yes, you will see that, Julius', said she, 'I shall go into a brothel. At Singapore. I have read of them there'. (Blixen 1979: 93)

This is an echo of Victor Eremita's view on the 1840s fate of women:

Jeg for mit Vedkommende, hvis jeg var Qvinde, vilde hellere være det i Orienten, hvor jeg var Slavinde; thi at være Slavinde, hverken mere eller mindre, er dog altid Noget i Sammenligning med at være hu hei og ingen Ting.... Var jeg Qvinde, jeg vilde heller sælges af min Fader til den høist Bydende som i Orienten, thi en Handel er der dog Mening i. (Kierkegaard, SKS. *Stadier*)

For my part, if I were a woman, I would rather be one in the Orient, where I would be a slave, for to be a slave – either more nor less – is still always something compared with being ‘hurrah’ and ‘nothing.’... If I were a woman, I would prefer being sold by my father to the highest bidder, as in the Orient, for a business transaction nevertheless does have meaning. (Kierkegaard 1988: 56, 58)

Annelise’s behaviour can thus also be regarded as a meta-narrative comment on Kierkegaard’s ‘In Vino Veritas’ and a radical showdown with the traditional romantic notion of woman as expressed by Victor Eremita, where woman is ‘hurrah’ and ‘nothing’. Annelise displays a radical will to escape this rigid gender role and create meaning through poetic fate and destiny. The point must be that the radical responses of the 1920s to conventional gender roles grew out of the fact that radical responses happen when society and gender roles have hardened so much that a large hammer – a radical reaction – is needed to break out of it. Aside from topping Kierkegaard by creating an even colder and harder, reflected (female) seducer than Kierkegaard’s own Johannes, Annelise in ‘Carnival’ is also Blixen’s version of the embodiment of such a radical response to historical gender norms.

The Aesthetics of the Day

In ‘Carnival’ it is said about Charles that his appearance is ‘fresh and bored’ (Blixen 1979: 69, my italics). Here we find another Kierkegaard allusion, this time to the short, witty and ironic text ‘Vexel-Driften’ (‘Rotation of Crops’) from *Enten-Eller. Første Deel (Either/Or, Part I)*. Here the narrator states that ‘De, der kjede Andre, ere Plebs, Hoben, Menneskets uendelige Slæng i Almindelighed; de, der kjede sig selv, ere de Udvalgte, Adelen’ (Kierkegaard, SKS. *Enten-Eller, Første Deel*) (‘Those who bore others are the plebeians, the crowd, the endless train of humanity in general; those who bore themselves are the chosen ones, the nobility’, Kierkegaard 1988: 288), and ‘Kjedsommelighed hviler paa det Intet, der slynger sig gennem Tilværelsen, dens Svimmelhed

er som den, der fremkommer ved at skue ned i en uendelig Afgrund, uendelig’ (Kierkegaard, SKS. *Enten-Eller. Første Deel* (‘Boredom rests upon the nothing that interlaces existence; its dizziness is infinite, like that which comes from looking down into a bottomless abyss ... All who are bored cry out for change’, Kierkegaard 1988: 291). These two sentences form together a very precise description of the young smart set in ‘Carnival’ and their boredom and disillusion, grown out of immense wealth. As the narrator states with regard to Charlie: ‘after all it did not really matter whether you won or lost in the poker of life’ (Blixen 1979: 89). The young, rich smart set, who do not need to fight for their existence through hard work like the ‘crowd’, ‘the endless train of humanity’, suffer from lack of meaning and direction in their lives, since they – through their privileged position – find themselves confronted with ‘the nothing that interlaces existence’, ‘the bottomless abyss’. Their desperate ‘cry of change’ is the lottery, where seven of them will be forced to make a carnivalesque inversion of their real lives: ‘We are eight people here all of us ... well off. Let us make a fund of all we have in the world, and draw lots for it. The winner will keep it for a year (ibid. 88) ... It will make ‘one of us very rich, and the others poor – truly poor, you understand, penniless’. (ibid. 104)

The young smart set embody the aesthetics of the day, just as the brethren-ship of dandies do in Kierkegaard’s ‘In Vino Veritas’: the Young Man, Constantin Constantius, Victor Eremita, Johannes the Seducer and the Fashion Designer (Bertung 1987: 45). Both groups of aesthetics are however each confronted with another point of view towards the end of each narrative. In the final scene of ‘In Vino Veritas’ the dandies come across Judge Wilhelm after they have demolished and left the lavish banquet. Here they overhear a conversation between Judge Wilhelm (who is the author of B’s papers in *Either/Or part II*) and his wife. Contrary to the gang of dandies, Wilhelm has become a married man and entered the sphere of the ethical. In ‘Carnival’ the young rich banquet participants – the smart set of the 1920s – are also confronted with a person alien to their environment and ways of thinking. Zamor¹⁵ represents – like the Judge in ‘In Vino Veritas’ – actuality and the ethical as opposed to the rich flappers, who view life only from an aesthetic point of view. Contrary to the young smart set,

Zamor is a working class man, who, at the time he enters the supper party, has committed a crime. He thinks he has killed his employer Madame Rubinstein and now threatens the young smart set with a gun to get five hundred kroner, so he can escape imprisonment. Money, life and death do not seem to really matter for the young smart set, except insofar as they have poetic and entertainment value. As Zamor observes, after having pulled the gun on them: 'It might be either a joke of the carnival, or again a very serious situation. What was their view...*Good God in heaven these people do not know the difference between the two things*' (Blixen 1979: 106-107, my italics).

Polly and the Shadow

In the final scene Polly reproaches herself for having manipulated and seduced Zamor to come in with them on the lottery: 'do you not understand, any of you, that I am going to make up for what I have done to Zamor? That was his virginity: that he would be like any of us. I made him sell his soul for a blank in the lottery... I am giving it a year to make good its loss to Zamor' (ibid. 120). She has acted like the character A from *Either/Or*, Part I. This character represents the aesthetic point of view, and is accused by Judge Wilhelm in the piece 'Ligevægten mellem det Æsthetiske og Ethiske i Personlighedens Udarbeidelse':

Du derimod, Du lever virkelig af Rov. Du lister Dig ubemærket paa Folk, stjæler deres lykkelige Øieblik, deres skønneste Øieblik fra dem, stikker dette Skyggebillede i Din Lomme, som den lange Mand i Schlemil og tager det frem, naar Du ønsker det. (Kierkegaard, SKS. *Enten-Eller. Anden Deel*)

You, however, actually live by plundering; unnoticed, you creep up on people, steal from them their happy moment, their most beautiful moment, stick this shadow picture in your pocket as the tall man did in *Schlemihl* and take it out whenever you wish. (Kierkegaard 1987c: 10)

Polly's solution to this recognition of herself being a manipulator

and seducer with no conscience is the idea of employing Zamor as her 'artificial shadow', her 'artificial conscience' which she takes out of her pocket whenever she wants, but here she – from the point of view of Judge Wilhelm – makes another mistake:

Seer man det Ethiske udenfor Personligheden og i et udvortes Forhold til denne, saa har man opgivet Alt, saa har man fortvivlet.... Naar man derfor stundom seer Mennesker med en vis redelig Iver slide og slæbe for at realisere det Ethiske, der som en Skygge bestandig flygter, saasnart de gribe efter den, saa er det baade comisk og tragisk. (Kierkegaard, SKS. *Enten-Eller. Anden Deel*)

If the ethical is regarded as outside the personality and in an external relation to it, then one has given up everything, then one has despaired.... That is why it is both comic and tragic to see at times people with a kind of honest zeal working their fingers to the bone in order to carry out the ethical, which like a shadow continually evades them as soon as they try to grasp it (Kierkegaard 1987c: 255)

Polly realizes in the final scene that she has no conscience of her own. She sees the ethical (conscience) as something outside her own personality and tries to make a comical short cut by employing Zamor as her 'artificial conscience'. The point is of course that the ethical cannot be substituted by shadow-images such as religion, ideology or in this case a person from another social class, but must be developed in the individual from the inside and out. With that in mind Polly does appear both comic and tragic in the final scene, even though the tale does end on a high note: 'Everything is infinite, and foolery as well', which is a *bon mot* that eventually would come to characterize the sophisticated comical under-current in Blixen's production in the many years to come.

Søren Kierkegaard as a Macabre Dandy

Kierkegaard was neither the womanizer-dandy of his day as a Valmont, Don Giovanni or his own Johannes the Seducer, nor was he a queer dandy like Lord Byron or Oscar Wilde.¹⁶ According to Blixen he was the virgin dandy, the non-sexual artist, tortured by the over-activity of his brain that had forever created an irreparable gap between his mind and his body that prevented him from having any sexual relations throughout his life. The idea of the artist as a sort of third gender is a recurring motive in Blixen's production. In 'Carnival' we find the artist Rosendaal to be dressed as an old eunuch; I have argued elsewhere that in *Ehrengard* the dandy artist, J. W. Cazotte, is in fact a forty-five-year-old virgin (Bunch in Rosendal & Sørensen, n.p.), which is why he blushes in the final scene. If we juxtapose Kierkegaard's insatiable desire and prolific productivity with his life in celibacy and his tiny, thin body – which in Georg Brandes' description below almost resembles a walking skeleton – we do see where Blixen gets the image of him as 'a sort of macabre dandy of his day':

En anden Dag kunde man paa Østergade ved Middagstid mellem 2 og 4 i Sværmen følge den spinkle og tynde Skikkelse med det ludende Hoved, med Paraplyen under Armen.... Saaledes saa sært og ensformigt, tog Ydersiden sig ud af et af de indvortes mest bevægede Liv, der nogensinde er ført i Danmark. (Brandes 1967: 10-11)

With regard to the significance of the body in 'Carnival' it is interesting to note what the narrator states about Annelise's body on the opening page: 'She also wrote what was considered very modern poetry, and it seems likely that in her case the spirit will turn out to be, contrary to what is presumably its normal fate, transient, and *the flesh immortal*' (because of her body in the 'immortal' paintings, 58, my italics). Again we can regard Blixen's physical description of Søren Kierkegaard (an androgynous dandy) as a meta-narrative comment on gender where she correctly observes how women, her example being Annelise, are often remembered first and foremost for their bodies and looks

(e.g. the flapper of the 1920s as the prime example) rather than their spiritual or artistic achievements, which is normally the contrary with regard to men. By alluding to Kierkegaard's bodily appearance Blixen injects gender balance into the text, so the flapper and the dandy, four women and four men, Annelise and Johannes the Seducer get a chance to meet under equal conditions in Blixen's 'Carnival.'

Conclusion

Blixen, I will argue, ultimately sees androgyny as the representation of trans-gender 'humanism' but also associates it with spirituality and the artist. The artist is, for Blixen, spiritually half man and half woman (the physical manifestations being the flapper and the dandy), but like Rosendaal and Kierkegaard a eunuch with regard to physical sexuality, and thus a sort of non-gender. The most striking picture of Karen Blixen deliberately playing with the androgynous dandy look is the picture released after the publication of *Seven Gothic Tales* (Heede 2001, cover), when it was revealed that the author, Isak Dinesen, was in fact the woman Karen Blixen. Here we find her in an extremely skinny condition, posing in a long, white dress, with her hair stroked back, white powder on her face and black painted eyebrows. Her face looks like a lesbian dandy from the 1920s, but her body is draped in a traditional white, feminine bridal dress and she appears as a sort of *macabre* bridal dandy entering into a marriage with *art*. Here the fiction of 'Carnival' became reality for Karen Blixen as has also been pointed out by Aitken: 'merging the body of her fiction with the fiction of her body, she made herself one of the preeminent figures of her own literary corpus....explicitly cast herself as an extravagant embodiment of the 'carnival' spirit' (Aitken 1990: 256). Moreover, the themes of gender and homosexuality and androgyny that we find in 'Carnival' – the *Zeitgeist* of the 1920s – would also become *the* major themes of *Seven Gothic Tales*, but removed back in time to a comfortable distance from the author's private and painful experiences with the gender trouble of the 1920s.

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Endnotes

¹ In a letter to Karen Blixen, October 7. 1932, Thomas Dinesen mentions that he has read *Carnival* (Blixen 1996a: 97). In capsule 137 in the Blixen Archive in the Royal Library in Copenhagen we find a brown envelope with black pen and Karen Blixen's handwriting, saying: 'Carnival 3.4. 1933. Thomas Dinesen Vænget, Hillerød'. This document, together with a new manuscript typed partly in blue (this manuscript is listed as a Xerox-copy in the Karen Blixen archive register: <http://www.kb.dk/permalink/2006/manus/692/dan/16/>, retrieved Jan 10. 2012) based on two older merged manuscripts and a fragment, shows that she re-worked the tale upon her return to Denmark probably more than once, even though the overall idea, themes and characters including 'the young Søren Kierkegaard' are already fully developed in the first manuscripts from Africa. The title 'Carnival', a list of the characters and two short outlines are to be found in a household account book from 1926 (Karen Blixen online archive register: <http://www.kb.dk/permalink/2006/manus/692/dan/9/>, retrieved Jan 10. 2012). The changes she made in the latest, blue-print manuscript (probably from April 1933) appear to be only minor compared to the older manuscripts.

² For a more thorough description of the genesis of 'Carnival' and how the tale relates to the letters Blixen wrote primarily 1923-1926, her relationship to Denys Finch-Hatton and the ideas about gender that would later become the essay: 'On Modern Marriage and other observations' (1977), see: Braad Thomsen 2011: 67-101, Thurman 1983: 275-281, Wivel 1987: 78-86 and Lasson 2008: 478.

³ The English titles are all from *Kierkegaard's Writings*. Edited and translated by Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Princeton: Princeton University Press. All Danish Titles are referring to the SKS online edition of Søren Kierkegaard's Collected Works: www.sks.dk

⁴ Georg Brandes was young Karen Blixen's great idol. In 1904, when Brandes was ill in hospital, she sent him flowers and a card expressing her admiration for his work. Brandes upon his recovery later turned up at Rungstedlund to thank her personally, but her mother told him that Karen was not home. When Brandes had left Karen was corrected and scolded for having contacted this considerably older man and great seducer of the day (Thurman 1983: 95).

⁵ In a letter to Thomas Dinesen shortly after returning back to Kenya, Blixen frivolously calls Brandes 'gamle Georg' (old Georg) and includes a letter to him, which she asks Thomas Dinesen to forward for her. Three months after in a letter to Mary Bess Westenholz she mentions that she: 'var ude i Somalibyen for at se at finde en eller anden Ting at sende gamle G.B., som jeg tænker paa med stor Venlighed; jeg er Dig meget taknemmelig for, at Du hjalp mig til at træffe ham' (Blixen 1978b: 19, 40) (I was out in the Somali village to look for something to send to old G.B., whom I thinking of with great kindness; I am very

grateful that you helped me meet him, my translation). It definitely seems that their meetings back in Denmark turned out well and that they kept a warm and friendly connection upon Blixen's return to Africa. Blixen never got a second chance to meet Brandes since he died already in Februar 1927, just sixteen months after Blixen met him for the first time.

⁶ At Karen Blixen's library in Rungstedlund we find the 1865 edition of Søren Kierkegaard's *Enten-Eller*. It had belonged to her father (owner signature 'Wilhelm Dinesen' with pencil in volume I inside on the cover) (Bondesson 1982: 179).

⁷ 'Jeg skriver paa et Par andre Marionetkomedier,- Holstein vilde jeg gerne have tre for at udgive dem som Bog' (in a letter to Mary Bess Westenholz, 23 May 1926, Blixen 1978b: 41) (I am writing on a couple of other Marionette Comedies,- Holstein wanted to have three to publish as a book, my translation).

⁸ 'idet den ene Forfatter kommer til at ligge inden i den anden som Æsker i et chinesiske Æskespil' (Kierkegaard, SKS. *Enten Eller. Første Deel*): ('since one author becomes enclosed within the other like the boxes in a Chinese puzzle', Kierkegaard 1987d: 9).

⁹ Since 'Carnival' is originally written in English, I only quote the English version without the Danish translation.

¹⁰ A Domino is a costume consisting of a hooded robe worn with an eye mask at a masquerade.

¹¹ Originally the year was 1927, but it was erased with white eraser ink and substituted with the year 1925.

¹² Peter Kæstrup's drawing of Søren Kierkegaard, presumably from 1845, can be found online here: <http://www.kb.dk/en/nb/tema/webudstillinger/sk-mss/sk-portraetter/klastrup.html>, retrieved Dec. 20. 2012.

¹³ Over the next seventeen years Søren Kierkegaard spent his entire inheritance of 31,335 rigsdaler according to Garff, which – if we take into consideration that a professorial salary at that time was less than 1200 rigsdaler – today would be the equivalent of twelve million kroner or well over one million pounds sterling (rough estimate) on fine dining, first growth Bordeaux wines, books, bespoke clothing and personal servants. In 'Synspunktet for min Forfatter-Virksomhed' (published by his brother posthumously in 1859), Kierkegaard however claims that his dandy-like lifestyle, while writing *Either/Or*, was a deliberate attempt to fool the inhabitants of Copenhagen into believing that he was just an indolent and decadent bachelor, so that they would not guess him to be the author of *Either/Or*. But as we can see from the account above, Kierkegaard did not change his life-style significantly after he was discovered to be the author and his personality, appearance and life-style do fit perfectly with the eighteenth-century notion of the dandy we have today, whether it for some time was a primarily a mask a not.

¹⁴ 'For Beau Brummel and the Regency dandies of the early nineteenth century, for example, there was not a clear-cut association of effeminate dandyism and same-sex desire. But, as Alan Sinfield and Ed Cohen have convincingly argued, after Oscar Wilde's trial in 1895, the effeminate dandy was linked to the homosexual in public imagination' (Glick 2009: 7)

¹⁵ 'Good evening', said Pierrot, 'you are very welcome. I know who you are.'

You are Zamor, Madame du Barry's Negro page. I have seen you in a picture of a supper party, in Paris'. The painting Mimi is referring to is called *Feast given by Madame du Barry (1743-93) for Louis XV on 2nd September 1771 at the inauguration of the Pavillon at Louveciennes*, by Jean Michel Moreau the Younger, which Karen Blixen probably saw at the Louvre during her visit in April 1925.

¹⁶ Even though queerness is indicated, since Annelise 'lisps' repeatedly, which could be interpreted as a gay-lisp: 'Oh Dear Rosie 'lisped' Søren Kierkegaard' and: 'Young Søren Kierkegaard said in her low voice, with its slight lisp which still managed to catch, as in a vice, the whole being of Tido on the other side of the table' (Blixen 1979: 76, 73). It is difficult to know, but at least it does enhance the androgynous appearance and add to the gender confusion.

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